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Nature is no Longer a Horizon. Towards Limitless Gestational Performance?

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1. Technique: between being and having/wanting to be

Technique has always been placed somewhere between being and having to be.

Within this relationship, having to be branches off into wanting to be.

In order to receive favourable assessment, what is required by society (having to be) in individual services and performances, lifestyle, and appearance must coincide with the will of the subject (wanting to be). Individuality may seem to have been obliterated within the social imaginary, but this is not the case. The implosion between the two is necessary and natural, on pain of exclusion.

While trying to add value to the self, the individual attempts to adopt the habitus that reflects the choices of others. This leads to the spread of an ethical sensibility in which each autobiographical past has to be reappropriated by the individual on the basis of future opportunities for action recognised at a social level. Ethical duty is transformed into work on the self, as individuals have sole responsibility for social and personal narratives. Through this awareness, individuals become duties towards themselves; although they are imposed, it is felt that a free choice has been made (Habermas, 2010).

Technique is positioned in the space between this form of being and this having or wanting to be.

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Technique has always accompanied human existence. Technique, or *techne* in Greek, identified the arts not only in the artistic sense of the term (artistic works) but also in the ability to carry out and/or complete something. This implies a science, the ability to learn and acquire expertise (Galimberti, 1999). The term technique therefore refers to both the set of instruments that make it possible to accomplish an objective and the principle of rationality underpinning the ability, which takes shape in objectives of functionality and efficiency.

It is technique that separates the world of humans from the world of animals. It became the very essence of their existence, allowing them to overcome biological limits and contributing to responsible and conscientious adaptation to the environment. It provides support for the very existence of the subject, who is forced to construct, plan, and create a set of artifices to compensate for human incompleteness (Galimberti, 1999).

This relationship between humans and technique has changed over time.

While technique was initially an instrument in the hands of power and the decision-making ability of humans (Jonas, 2019a), the relationship changed with the passing of time and was eventually reversed, modifying not only the dominant position of the individual over technique but also, as a result, the value of the effect of technique.

While in the oldest form of this relationship technique is an instrument controlled by the subject who dominates the world, thanks to its development it has now become the environment in which and through which people subjugate their own needs to this control process (Mori, 2019; Galimberti, 1999). Humankind seems to have been transformed into the very instrument of technique.

While technique was initially a means whose value was completely absorbed by its intended purpose, subsequent developments transformed any objective to make it achievable. There is therefore an opportunity to grasp and obtain anything through technique.

In this context, the means overpowers the purpose, which loses its value by drawing closer to the subject.

There is thus a democratisation of objectives, which assume the same identity and lose their aura of mystery and unattainability to become increasingly earthly.

Humankind is no longer distanced from heaven and earth (Galimberti, 1999) and their associated elements, which have become flexible. Human planning is now limitless. Indeed, this ability has become a new divinity, which consequently removes the security established by the boundaries of action, placing the subject in a state of restlessness caused by a new form of power that

must be managed. The result is a kind of cyclical process where completion and perfection cease to exist (Galimberti, 1999).

While objectives assume a worldly value, technique becomes a form of irrefutable divinity whose power exceeds the value of the purpose itself. As a new universal condition that allows the production and satisfaction of needs, technique is now the main attainment. From a means, it becomes an end. Due to its resolute force, technique is the main guiding cause of human action. Thanks to its new recognised divine power, technique becomes autonomous with regard to the action of the subject, imposing its instrumental rationality and, above all, its objective law.

This has given rise to the ethical problem.

The discovery of new technologies benefitting human work (such as industrial machinery) never generated ethical reflections regarding this function of guidance and support. The ethical question arises as soon as the subject is implicated directly in the activity. In this case, technique becomes a form of its action for which the subject is responsible, thereby implying moral considerations (Jonas, 2019b).

Although the two perspectives assign subjects with a completely different role in their relationship with technique – a position of dominance or subjugation –, this relationship can be explained, albeit with different significance, through the single interpretive concept of control.

In both cases, the driving force structuring the relationship is a desire for control that steers action. It is a process for checking whether a condition is present and assessing efficiency and results that have been or will be achieved.

Time is the variable that creates a division in meaning in the act of control by the subject who is helped or uses technique.

In the first case, control is implemented at the end of the process to grasp and assess the achievement of the pre-established results with regard to a limited and limiting starting position. In the second case, when technique directly involves the subject in a cyclical relationship (Galimberti, 1999), control becomes an inherent part of the process. Indeed, as it is a process without a starting point, the control mechanism goes through every moment, stage, and step. It is a form of control that pre-empts the process, absorbing it in its entirety.

In another study (Viviani, 2018), this temporal distinction in the implementation of the control process in the human relationship with technique allowed me to suggest a conceptual differentiation, also referred to by Paola Di Nicola in her article. I will now briefly summarise this analysis of the terms *prestazione* (service) and performance.

The Italian word *prestazione*, which can be translated as service, comes from the Latin *praestatio-onis*, meaning a guarantee or payment with legal value. This

concept has become ambivalent with regard to two other important terms: result and behaviour. As far as the former is concerned, the meaning of *prestazione* is a judgement in relation to an activity undertaken, in the sense of demonstrating the achievement of pre-established results through action. In the latter meaning, the term focuses more on behaviour than objectives and results; the *prestazione* of an individual can be worthy because, regardless of the result, the subject has demonstrated commendable behaviour relative to personal abilities. This is a guiding principle for ongoing work and investment in individual production faculties. The subject providing the service must compete in the market by attempting to deploy their potential, optimising it in the interests of competition (Marcuse, 1986; Chicchi, Simone, 2017).

The term performance is instead an umbrella term connected to different dimensions. It derives from *pēfoomēns*, from *performare*, which in Late Latin meant “give form”. Often used with the sense of execution, it encompasses two threads of meaning:

1. Give definitive form, mould, with aesthetic implications regarding the sphere of appearance (Viviani, 2014);
2. Provide a good performance. In this case, the meaning is similar to the concept of service.

The linguistic analysis of this word highlights greater focus on “accomplish” and “carry out” than the emphasis of the term service on objectives to achieve and results.

Regarding the relationship between people and technique, it refers to the concept of *prestazione* in its ancient perspective as technique is a support to help people achieve pre-established results and objectives.

In the modern context, the relationship implies a process and performative control because it reverses the way that technique and people interreact, to the extent that the result is a cyclical relationship where the subject is governed by the relationship.

A graphic representation of service and performance in the relationship between people and technique would need to use different geometrical forms.

In the premodern perspective, the relationship would be depicted by a straight line with the action of control in the final part, controlling the results and objectives achieved; the *prestazioni* of this relationship.

According to the current perspective, the relationship would be portrayed by a sphere in which control penetrates every fluctuation in the process. It would not be possible to show the beginning or end, as they do not exist. However, the power of control is anticipatory, placed above the principle itself¹.

¹ All this represents the logic of the simulacrum. The fulcrum of the process of simulation – the elimination of the original that gives life to the simulacrum – causes

2. (Im)perfect gestational performance?

Techniques of medically assisted procreation (MAP) can be used in this analysis to explain the concept of *prestazione* in the relationship between technique and people, while surrogacy can expound performance. With MAP, the aim of treatment is to enhance the body and remove limits that hinder the process of procreation, while performative intervention is preventive, anticipating the result and constructing a project to achieve it. Surrogacy, on the other hand, is not a body improvement procedure – it is not treatment for a body with procreative limits – but the insertion of a third body with no procreative limits placed at the couple’s disposal. It is therefore a context external to the couple that wants to procreate, in accordance with a gestation process that is controlled even before it starts through the selection of the “body” that will assist conception.

Furthermore, control of a baby and its health during the embryonic stage tends to become increasingly early thanks to technological discoveries and instruments. This context also includes parental choices to work on the gene pool before the birth of a baby designed from scratch.

Regardless of the judgement of these techniques, in agreement with what Paola Di Nicola has written, surrogacy has divided relationships between mother and child, and man and woman, making them artificial; the procreation process is structured around steps, rules, and needs/desires which are pursued in accordance with a rational logic.

The ethical aspect of moral considerations about surrogacy, above all regarding genomic work, derives from the fact that the two extremes of the relationship that generated this reflection – being and having to be – implode on each other. The parental couple becomes the creator, assuming a responsibility and power for which it is impossible to establish the right degree of propriety and ethical conduct. Is it right that a child is guided towards a future professional career by a genetic heritage chosen by parents who favour one set of skills and abilities over another (such as a scientific bent instead of artistic leanings)?

The question becomes increasingly complex because the rapidity of technological development does not move at the same pace as ethical thinking.

the implosion of the false, reproduced copy and its primary, original, and true referent. This leads to the end of the confines separating the real (true) from the false (copy) and the collapse of the two cornerstones that enabled the authenticity of this relationship to be assessed. In the instantaneousness of the reproduction, the original enters an immortal reproductive cycle that is born at the same time that it dies (Viviani, 2008).

The difference between treating one's own body (*prestazione*) and planning the body of another (performance) implies a moral distinction.

Two points of reflection emerge from the issue raised here.

Firstly, with regard to the sought-after best gestational performance, how much space is there for the autonomy of the foetus/baby/child and their independence in terms of development and growth? Planning the perfect design at will means choosing from infinite possibilities and outlining the path along which a child will grow with no regard for their preferences. Preferring one path over another means making an evaluation that inevitably eliminates all other scenarios. How can it be certain that these eliminated life paths would not have been chosen by the planned child? Any type of choice and genetic change that makes a child more skilled in a specific field (music, sport, or anything else) pushes them towards pre-established types, compromising their autonomy and thereby infringing on their freedom to build their own life freely (Sandel, 2014).

While this issue stems from the general debate, literature on the matter tends to reflect on the autonomy and independence of the conceived child, leading to a second question.

Specifically, the relationship between mother and surrogate and, more generally, the intervention of technique in conception, shifts the attention to the potential characteristics of this relationship in terms of emotions and love. The relationship between mother and child has always started at the moment of conception, going beyond strictly biological elements to involve the emotional sphere. The foetus perceives its mother's mood: her joy, frustration, and anger, to name but a few emotions.

The foetus's life in the maternal womb and the emotional rhythms inherited from its mother determine its condition from conception onwards, but also its future emotional experience.

What happens to this affective relationship at this point? If the mother is transformed into a generating machine for the best gestational performance, how is the emotional realm considered?

In terms of social expectations, it has always been acknowledged that women have a natural predisposition for empathy and looking after others (Tronto, 2013). Women are naturally maternal, not so much because they have bodies that can generate life as because they recognise others' needs and naturally know how to dedicate themselves to others (Hochschild, 2006).

In this case, with regard to the mother who has (or wants) to achieve the best generative performance, also in terms of genetic planning, how can the best emotional performance be managed? In the guise of programmers, how can parents guarantee the naturalness that characterises the love between mother and child? A parent has to look after their child in the best way possible, but the race for the best genetic performance does not seem to contemplate the

emotional aspect. Parenthood implies taking care of children without being able to choose them; it is a 'school of humility' (Sandel, 2014) that allows parents to grow by overcoming difficulties, unforeseen events, fears, and anxieties. They therefore also grow on an emotional level and in terms of emotional management.

Channelling randomness, eliminating unforeseen events, and rejecting nature's verdict (Jonas, 2019a) means removing the unique nature of conception and pregnancy, which helps to create the unique nature of the baby. The logic of the simulacrum, which aspires to hyperreality by eliminating limits and imperfections, leads to the death of the origin (Viviani, 2008). Furthermore, historical flow, personal growth, and individuality are also wiped out along with the origin; this process triggers a mechanism that aims to achieve constant, endless improvement in accordance with the logic of efficacy and rational efficiency (Marcuse, 1982).

The female body that is emerging is not only a sexless body, as highlighted by Paola Da Nicola, but also an unaffectionate body. The relational vacuum imagined by Di Nicola also affects the emotional sphere in individual and relational terms, involving the baby, the "conceiving" couple, and perhaps even the family that is about to be born.

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